

Serving Animals: When the Bond Breaks

Millions of cats are surrendered to animal shelters every year. Some shelters are implementing new options for cat owners who feel they have no choice but to surrender their pet.

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Until recently, the reasons people give up their cats or dogs have been poorly understood and little data existed, Salman says. Then the National Council on Pet Population Study and Policy stepped in. Formed in 1993, this coalition of 11 big-league animal organizations, including the American Humane Association, the Cat Fanciers' Association and the American Kennel Club, recognized it would take a group effort to tackle the problem of unwanted companion animals. Accordingly, the council began several studies in 1993.

Hard ScienceThe Regional Shelter Survey study jump-started the NCPPSP's efforts. Six members of its Scientific Advisory Committee, including Dr. Salman, designed, implemented and analyzed the study.

For the study, specially trained researchers went into 12 selected animal shelters for one year to find out why people give up their pets. Information collected from 3,772 pet owners and questionnaires recorded for 6,929 animals produced the first hard data about why people take their animals to shelters (see sidebar), says Pam Burney, former president of the NCPPSP and executive director of North Richland Hills Environmental Services in North Richland Hills, Texas.

New Attitudes and ApproachesThe study shows moving is among the top three reasons for surrendering cats. That's one reason The Humane Society of the United States recently developed "Renting with Pets," an in-depth online resource for rental managers and pet owners, visit www.rentwithpets.org. The Website encourages landlords to consider pets-allowed policies and helps responsible pet owners find pet-friendly rental housing.

Some shelters, including Burney's, take the study results and run with it. "Now that the council has the data, we can work with shelters, veterinarians and other animal organizations to design intervention strategies," she says.

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